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ABSTRACT

Eight college listening texts were selected and evaluated by the following criteria: organization, supporting material, and readability. Text organization was assessed by preface material, table of contents, index, and references. Text supporting material was evaluated by the use of hard data, soft data, visual aids, and bibliographies. Text readability was judged by transitions, tone, visual structure, and reading level. Worksheets were developed for each of the criteria, and numerical scores were assigned to each of the texts evaluated. (Worksheets for evaluating the texts, summaries of data, and a rank order of the eight texts are included.) (Author)

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ED 366 021

EXPERIENTIAL INSTRUCTION OF LISTENING FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO TEACHING LISTENING

Evaluating Listening Texts

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ABSTRACT

Eight college listening texts were selected and evaluated by the following criteria: Organization, Supporting Material, and Readability. Text organization was assessed by preface material, table of contents, index, and references. Text supporting material was evaluated by the use of hard data, soft data, visual aids, and bibliographies. Text readability was judged by transitions, tone, visual structure, and reading level. Worksheets were developed for each of these criteria, and numerical scores were assigned to each of the texts being evaluated.

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OVERVIEW

This paper explains a process for evaluating college listening texts. Since those interested in teaching and researching listening might benefit from this process, the steps are detailed in this two part report. The first section discusses the pre-evaluation steps (selecting texts and developing evaluation criteria); the second section reports the evaluation results.

PRE-EVALUATION STEPS

Two steps preceded the actual text evaluation. First was the selection of the texts to be evaluated, and second, the development of evaluation criteria.

TEXT SELECTION

In choosing the listening texts for evaluation, three criteria were considered: 1) the text was appropriate for a college course, that is, it contained chapters, headings, a preface, and focused on the topic of listening as applied to understanding, personal interactions, teaching and learning, management, and negotiation. Highly specialized listening texts--such as listening to music, birds, or whales--were not selected for evaluation. Two, the text was current--published within the past decade. Three, texts had 100 pages, minimum. Based on these criteria, eight texts were selected:

Text 1: Burley-Allen, Madelyn. Listening: the Forgotten Skill. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1982.

Text 2: Bostrom, Robert N. Listening Behavior: Measurement and Application. New York: The Guilford Press, 1990.

Text 3: Borisoff, Deborah and Michael Purdy. Listening in Everyday life: a Personal and Professional Approach. London: University Press of America, 1991.

Text 4: De Marc, George, Lyman K. Steil and Joanne Summerfield. Listening: it can Change your Life: a Handbook for Scientists and Engineers. New York: Wiley & Co., 1983

Text 5: Maidment, Robert. Tuning in: a Guide to Effective Listening. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1984.

Text 6: Wolff, Florence I. and Nadine C. Marsnick. Perceptive Listening. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1992.

Text 7: Wolvin, Andrew and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley. Listening, 4th ed. Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown, 1992.

Text 8: Kaufmann, Paul J. Sensible Listening: the key to Responsive Interaction, 2d ed. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing Co., 1993.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

Central to the task of evaluating these listening texts was the development of appropriate criteria. Here, were a myriad of possibilities. In wading through the alternatives, one needed to consider criteria that could be consistently and reasonably applied in a timely manner.

An initial thought was to set-up a criterion called, "Thorough and Accurate Presentation of Listening Theory," but this was not workable because few generally accepted theories mark the study of listening. Unlike a text about descriptive statistics where one would expect to find mean, median, mode, and range discussed, one text about listening might cover gender differences and recall, while another might cover comprehensive and therapeutic listening, but not gender and recall. Consequently, an evaluation criterion directly targeting listening theories was not used in this text evaluation.

Three main evaluative criteria with four subcategories for each were developed. The first main criteria is Organization, with the four subcategories A) Preface, B) Table of Contents, C) Index, and D) References. Supporting Material is the second main category, with subcategories A) Hard Data, B) Soft Data, C) Visual Aids, and D) Bibliography. The third main category is Readability, with subcategories A) Transitions, B) Tone, C) Visual Structure, and D) Reading Level.

For consistency of evaluation and inter-rater reliability, an evaluation worksheet was developed. The worksheet explained each of the three evaluation criteria and provided the evaluators a form to record their evaluations. The criteria explanations and example worksheets follow.

Organization.--This category gives direction to the text user by dividing the text into manageable sections of information. The four subcategories of organization are 1) preface, 2) table of contents, 3) index, and 4) references.

The preface is made-up of the introductory or forwarding comments, and sometimes a personal note to the reader. The preface may include historical background, explanation of overarching concepts and suggestions for approaching the covered material. The table of contents outlines the significant topics and provides the reader with a schema to map the information.

The index allows the reader to reference key terminology, concepts, and names by giving their location in the text. Similarly, the reference section may contain a glossary, appendixes, and notes.

Supporting Material.--Through 1) hard data, 2) soft data, 3) visual aids, and 4) bibliographies, supporting material lends clarity and understandability to the key ideas in the text. Hard data, the first subcategory of supporting material, are experimental and statistical. They give support through measurable facts. Soft data also give support through testimony, quotes, anecdotes, and illustrations. The third subcategory, visual aids, demonstrates hard and soft data information through tables, graphs, cartoons and pictures. Lastly, bibliographies are listings of the external sources for the text, and allow the reader to research and verify the information.

Readability.--Readability is the component of the text that establishes and maintains the author's relationship with the intended reader. A first means of accomplishing readability is through transitions which provide forecasts, summations, and topic changes. Transitions give continuity to the text. The second subcategory of readability is tone, which includes the use of active, vivid language and the degree of formality the author employs. Third is visual structure which involves the appeal of the print (font/size), column width, paragraph length, and page layout to the reader. Visual structure should not be confused with visual aids as defined under supporting material. Subcategory four is reading level which considers the appropriateness of the vocabulary for the readiness level of the intended reader.

With the three criteria and their four subcategories defined, the next step was to prepare worksheets for the text evaluations. Considering the tendency toward midrange responses with Likert scales, the worksheet was a means to provide the evaluator assurance that extreme values could be justified. An odd numbered scale of one (1) being poor, to five (5) being better, was chosen for each of the three general evaluation categories--

ORGANIZATION, SUPPORTING MATERIAL, AND READABILITY, and a two part checklist was designed for each of the four subcategories under each of these. (See worksheets, p. 6.)

To help assure inter-rater reliability, if an evaluator found that a text had none of the two items under a subcategory, a zero (0) or one (1) was recorded. If a text met one of the two items, a rating of two (2) or three (3) was entered, and if it met both of the subcategory items, a rating of four (4) or five (5) was entered. Written comments were requested to explain scores within these ranges.

This evaluation system accomplished two purposes: first, it completed the goal of having some degree of objectivity by demonstrating the range in which a score would lie. Second, it incorporated subjectivity by allowing the evaluator to correlate the even numbered checklist with the odd numbered Likert scores. This is realistic because some unique criteria may not be expressed in the checklist but may indicate a higher or lower degree of quality. These differences in text quality, then, can be expressed in the higher or lower choice of Likert values. The comments gave insightful reasons to these unique evaluative factors and encouraged the evaluator to use the end scores of the Likert scale comfortably.

Before closing discussion of evaluation criteria, it is important to touch on two topics that were excluded as evaluation categories: Clarity and Listening Theory. Certainly both of these concepts are important in listening textbooks. Fortunately, their impact can be indirectly judged by the three main evaluation categories. For example, clarity is created by appropriately organizing concepts, effectively supporting them, and insuring the readability of the presentation. Further, theories that are valid and durable are likely to be well organized, and, more importantly, supported with fact, data, and experimentation while presented at an appropriate readability level.

After the criteria were established, condensed evaluation report forms were prepared for each category--Organization, Supporting Material, and Readability:

Rater/Reviewer: _____

EVALUATION REPORT FORM: ORGANIZATION--OVERALL RATING:_____

_____Preface:
_____Author gives historical background and explanation of the thought process for developing text and gives validation for the course of study.

_____Includes introductory or forwarding comments and personal notes or suggestions to readers.

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____Table of Contents:
_____Outlines significant topics in form of headings and subheadings.

_____Gives a chapter introduction which provides the reader with a schema to map the information.

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____Index:
_____Allows reader to reference key terminology and key concepts and their location in the text

_____Additionally, index provides opportunity to look up key individuals (author index)

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____References:
_____A glossary is given that provides definition relative to the text.

_____Additional appendixes endnotes, footnotes, or chapter notes are provided to give further references.

COMMENTS: _____

_____

OVERALL COMMENTS--ORGANIZATION: _____

_____

Rater/Reviewer: _____

EVALUATION REPORT FORM: SUPPORTING MATERIAL--OVERALL RATING:_____

_____Hard Data:
- _____Experiments are descriptive and sufficient in design and conclusion.
- _____Statistical data gives support through measurable facts.

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____Soft Data:
- _____Testimony and quotes are provided that support the material.
- _____Anecdotes and verbal illustrations give real-life examples to help clarify material.

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____Visual Aids:
- _____Tables and graphs help to digest the hard data into understandable formats.
- _____Cartoons and pictures are provided for additional support and visual testimony.

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____Bibliography:
- _____Variety of sources i.e. journals, texts, and interviews has been included in research to provide complete, well-rounded foundation
- _____While noting the value of early theorists the concentration of the text is on recent material.

COMMENTS: _____

_____

OVERALL COMMENTS--SUPPORTING MATERIAL: _____

_____

Rater/Reviewer: _____

EVALUATION REPORT FORM: READABILITY--OVERALL RATING:_____

_____Transitions:
_____Key Ideas are forecast and summarized.

_____Smooth topic changes lend to continuity.

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____Tone:
_____Text uses action verbs as well as vivid and succinct descriptions.

_____Expressed intent by establishing familiarity through use of formal or informal language.

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____Visual Structure:
_____The size and font of print are appropriate to level of text and comfortable to the reader.

_____Page layout (column width, paragraph length) is conductive to reading.

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____Reading Level:
_____Key terms are identified by bold print or italics.

_____Context lends understanding to ambiguous terms and/or words are explicitly defined within the text.

COMMENTS: _____

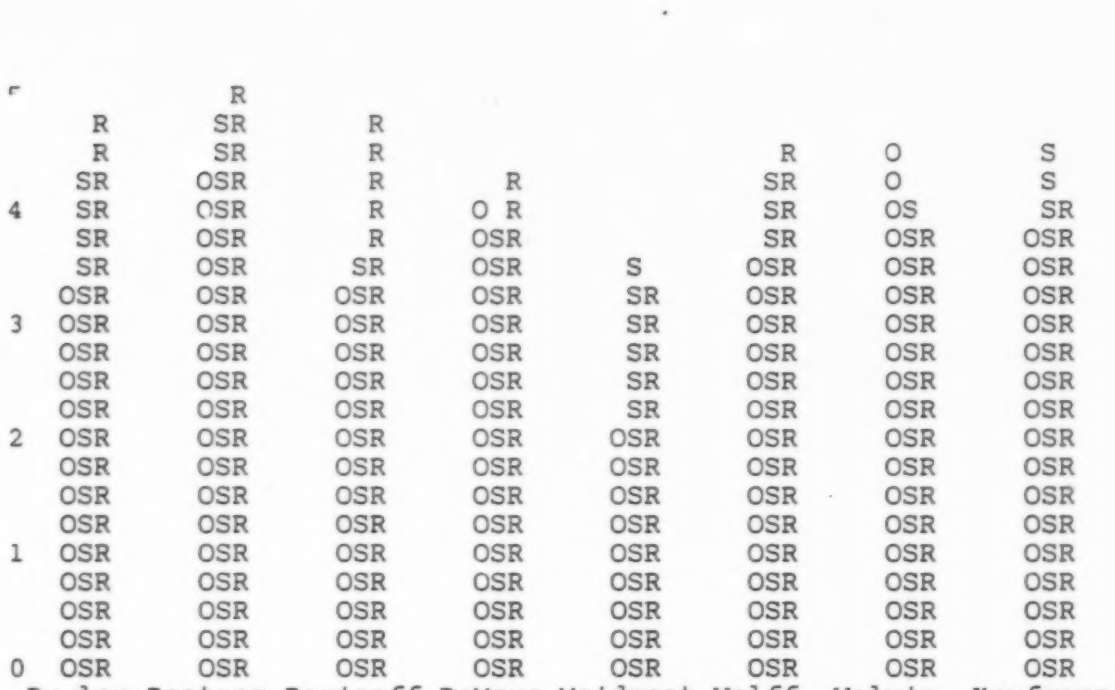
_____

OVERALL COMMENTS--READABILITY: _____

_____

THE EVALUATION OF LISTENING TEXTS

Once criteria were developed and formatted, the texts were evaluated. Sixteen students in a graduate listening seminar evaluated the texts. Each text was evaluated by two students, and the two scores were averaged for each category. The data were graphed for text comparison:



DATA SUMMARY

Book 1: Burley-Allen. Listening: the Forgotten Skill.

I.	ORGANIZATION		3.4
	A. Preface	4.0	
	B. Table of Contents	3.5	
	C. Index	2.5	
	D. References	3.5	
II.	SUPPORTING MATERIAL		4.6
	A. Hard Data	4.5	
	B. Soft Data	5.0	
	C. Visual Aids	5.0	
	D. Bibliography	4.0	
III.	READABILITY		4.8
	A. Transitions	4.0	
	B. Tone	5.0	
	C. Visual Structure	5.0	
	D. Reading Level	5.0	

DATA SUMMARY

Book 2: Bostrom. Listening Behavior: Measurement and Application.

I.	ORGANIZATION		4.4
	A. Preface	4.5	
	B. Table of Contents	4.5	
	C. Index	4.5	
	D. References	4.0	
II.	SUPPORTING MATERIAL		4.8
	A. Hard Data	5.0	
	B. Soft Data	5.0	
	C. Visual Aids	4.0	
	D. Bibliography	5.0	
III.	READABILITY		5.0
	A. Transitions	5.0	
	B. Tone	5.0	
	C. Visual Structure	5.0	
	D. Reading Level	5.0	

DATA SUMMARY

Book 3: Borisoff and Purdy. Listening in Everyday life: a Personal and Professional Approach.

I.	ORGANIZATION		3.5
	A. Preface	4.0	
	B. Table of Contents	5.0	
	C. Index	2.0	
	D. References	3.0	
II.	SUPPORTING MATERIAL		3.8
	A. Hard Data	4.0	
	B. Soft Data	4.0	
	C. Visual Aids	3.0	
	D. Bibliography	4.0	
III.	READABILITY		5.0
	A. Transitions	5.0	
	B. Tone	5.0	
	C. Visual Structure	5.0	
	D. Reading Level	5.0	

DATA SUMMARY

Book 4: DeMarc, Steil, and Summerfield. Listening: it can Change your life: a Handbook for Scientists and Engineers.

I.	ORGANIZATION		4.1
	A. Preface	4.0	
	B. Table of Contents	4.5	
	C. Index	4.5	
	D. References	3.5	
II.	SUPPORTING MATERIAL		3.9
	A. Hard Data	2.0	
	B. Soft Data	4.5	
	C. Visual Aids	5.0	
	D. Bibliography	4.0	
III.	READABILITY		4.5
	A. Transitions	4.5	
	B. Tone	4.5	
	C. Visual Structure	4.5	
	D. Reading Level	4.5	

DATA SUMMARY

Book 5: Maidment. Tuning in: a Guide to Effective Listening.

I.	ORGANIZATION		2.3
	A. Preface	4.0	
	B. Table of Contents	3.0	
	C. Index	1.0	
	D. References	1.0	
II.	SUPPORTING MATERIAL		3.5
	A. Hard Data	4.0	
	B. Soft Data	5.0	
	C. Visual Aids	4.0	
	D. Bibliography	1.0	
III.	READABILITY		3.3
	A. Transitions	1.0	
	B. Tone	4.0	
	C. Visual Structure	5.0	
	D. Reading Level	3.0	

DATA SUMMARY

Book 6: Wolff and Marsnick. Perceptive Listening.

I.	ORGANIZATION		3.9
	A. Preface	3.5	
	B. Table of Contents	5.0	
	C. Index	5.0	
	D. References	2.3	
II.	SUPPORTING MATERIAL		4.6
	A. Hard Data	4.0	
	B. Soft Data	5.0	
	C. Visual Aids	5.0	
	D. Bibliography	4.3	
III.	READABILITY		4.8
	A. Transitions	5.0	
	B. Tone	5.0	
	C. Visual Structure	4.3	
	D. Reading Level	5.0	

DATA SUMMARY

Book 7: Wolvin and Coakley. Listening. 4th ed.

I.	ORGANIZATION		4.8
	A. Preface	5.0	
	B. Table of Contents	5.0	
	C. Index	5.0	
	D. References	4.0	
II.	SUPPORTING MATERIAL		4.5
	A. Hard Data	4.0	
	B. Soft Data	5.0	
	C. Visual Aids	4.0	
	D. Bibliography	5.0	
III.	READABILITY		4.1
	A. Transitions	5.0	
	B. Tone	4.0	
	C. Visual Structure	3.5	
	D. Reading Level	4.0	

DATA SUMMARY

Book 8: Kaufmann. Sensible Listening: the key to Responsive Interaction.

I.	ORGANIZATION		4.0
	A. Preface	5.0	
	B. Table of Contents	4.0	
	C. Index	4.0	
	D. References	3.0	
II.	SUPPORTING MATERIAL		4.8
	A. Hard Data	4.0	
	B. Soft Data	5.0	
	C. Visual Aids	5.0	
	D. Bibliography	5.0	
III.	READABILITY		4.5
	A. Transitions	4.0	
	B. Tone	5.0	
	C. Visual Structure	4.0	
	D. Reading Level	5.0	

CONCLUSION

Averaging the three main criteria scores, the texts are ranked in the following order:

#1 Bostrom. Listening Behavior: Measurement and Application.
4.73 of a possible score of 5

#2 Wolvin and Coakley. Listening.
4.46 of a possible score of 5

#3 Wolff and Marsnick. Perceptive Listening.
4.43 of a possible score of 5

tie

#3 Kaufmann. Sensible Listening: the key to Responsive Interaction.
4.43 of a possible score of 5

#4 Burley-Allen. Listening: the Forgotten Skill.
4.23 of a possible score of 5

#5 DeMarc, Steil, and Summerfield. Listening: it can Change Your life.
4.16 of a possible score of 5

#6 Borisoff and Purdy. Listening in Everyday life: a Personal and Professional Approach
4.10 of a possible score of 5

#7 Maidment. Tuning in: a Guide to Effective Listening.
3.03 of a possible score of 5

Evaluating listening texts is a individual process, where instructors select a text to meet the specific needs and backgrounds of their students. The scheme presented in this paper for evaluating texts can be a helpful first step in making that final text selection.